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From : "Jon Dively"

To : G-Aguilar3@wiu.edu, N-Padgett@wiu.edu, JK-Thompson1@wiu.edu, EA-Dolieslager@wiu.edu, KMJ-Lang@wiu.edu, MF-Radosh@wiu.edu, DW-Shaw@wiu.edu, JB-Trustee@wiu.edu

Subject : WIU Change in Leadership

The purpose of this email is to address some frustrations and lack of leadership from President Thomas at Western Illinois University. I will also be commenting on the recent graduation events in which I was present for two, out of control graduation commencements. One for my son (LEJA) and his girlfriend (School of Nursing).

I grew up in Macomb where my Grandfather was a full professor (Industrial Engineering) at WIU. My other Grandfather was a Medical Doctor and my father is a Dentist. My mother taught in the Macomb School District for over 30 years. My wife and I attended Cornell College and I ran on the Cornell Track and Field team.

I currently am a dual District Commander (District 14 and District 20) with the Illinois State Police and cover 10 counties in which my home office is in Macomb. My wife and I own Nostalgia on the Square. This is a well known business and the Macomb Chamber of Commerce, 2018 Business of the Year, located on the Macomb Historic Square. We are 100% vested in our community and Western Illinois University. Between the two of us, we are on City of Macomb Committees, my wife serves on the WIU Purple and Gold Gala Committee, and I serve on the WIU CUPP (Community-University Partnership Program) committee.

Last weekend, as my wife and I attended two graduation ceremonies, we were astonished by how ill behaved the crowds were at both graduations. Yelling, cat calling, cussing, stomping on the bleachers, and interrupting the keynote speakers during the event. It was apparent that there was nothing in place to control this or address disruptive behavior. I was equally offended by President Thomas' speech referencing Kanye West as some great leader of any kind of inspiration for our graduation class. Kanye encourages police brutality and incites the Black Lives Movement which has gained national attention for civil disobedience and violence. His lyrics promote violence and violence towards the police. We think Thomas could have easily found better leaders that all student and families could relate to rather than to choose one so divisive.

As proud parents hoping to celebrate one of our sons biggest accomplishments, we were extremely disappointed by the lack of honor during the ceremony. During the announcement, as our son walked on the stage, we could barely hear his name being called due to the lack of respect from families screaming. We also observed the lack of respect of the ceremony by several graduates completely leaving the ceremony when they received their diplomas and refusing to sit back down until the event ended.

We were impressed by Dr. Jackie Thompson's speech and were ashamed that the crowd wouldn't even stay quiet for her speech.

WIU needs a change from the top. The president received a no confidence vote from the staff and professors at WIU. The enrollment has dropped significantly. This affects negatively on our community and local business owners.

I have been on a committee with the President and have heard nothing but his distaste for law enforcement stating "I don't even feel safe to drive down the road." His view and attitude towards the police is well known. For a President to talk negatively about the Police, knowing that the LEJA program is one of the largest schools of the University, just floors me.

I am extremely impressed by many of the professors and administrators that are doing their best on social media. I have seen nothing from the President himself. People like John Biernbaum, Brad Bainter, Amy Spelman, Ketra Russell, Darcie Shinberger, Gary Johnson, Joe Roselieb and Macomb Mayor, Michael Inman, to name a few, who are constantly using social media to push the WIU experience. The last I heard, the President wanted to set up a steering committee and task forces to study what needed to be done to turn the university around. This should have been done years ago!

Our community needs a change, WIU needs a change, and we need that change to start with removing President Thomas from his position.

Thanks for your time and good luck!

Jon and Lara Dively
Macomb Vested Community Members and Small Business Owners